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COMIC & CARD PICKS

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#15

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October 1995

25 most up and coming creators in comics

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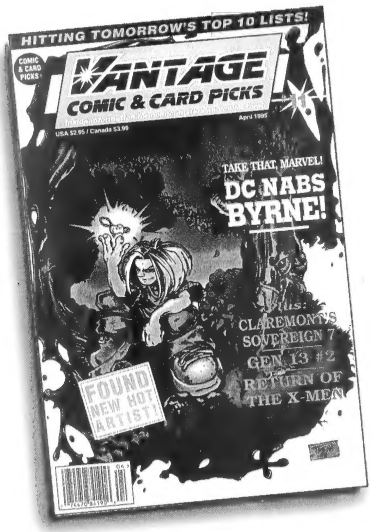

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COMIC & CARD PICKS
number fifteen

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Special thanks to our advisors!

Vantage Comic & Card Picks
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TOP PICKS OF THE MONTH

Professor Xavier and the X-Men / X-Men Dollar Book #1-up (Marvel / X-Men / New X-Men unlimited series, cheap, part of continuity!)

Untold Tales of Spider-Man #1-up (Marvel / Spider-Man / New Spider-series, unlimited, cheap, part of continuity)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

Araknis #1-up (Mushroom Comics / Ortiz brothers are up-and-comers)

Avengelyne: Power #1-up (Image / Avengelyne heating up)

The Book of Ballads and Sagas #1-up (Green Man Press / Vess and Gaiman)

Ghost Rider 2099 #1-up (Marvel / Ashley and Wood are up-and-comers)

Isaac Asimov's I-Bots #1 (Tekno•Comix / Perez for 6 months or more, Asimov)

Magic: The Gathering — Homelands (Acclaim Comics / One of three rare magic cards)

New Gods #1, first series (DC / First New Gods and First Orion, new series is due out)

New Gods #1-up, new series (DC / Crossovers will funnel demand)

Showcase '95 #12 (DC / low-print early Sovereign Seven)

Sovereign Seven #5-up (DC / low-print early Sovereign Seven)

Uncanny X-Men #248 (Marvel / First Jim Lee X-Men / Lee to return to monthly comics)

Uncanny X-Men #256-258 (Marvel / Early Jim Lee X-Men / Lee to return to monthly comics)

Underworld #1-3 (DC / Big-time funnel marketing)

Vantage is opposed to speculation, which we define as the purchase of comics by a fan solely for the purpose of selling quickly to others. The difficulty in speculating is that the comic market fluctuates quickly and dealers will not pay full market value for your books even when they do go up (they have to resell them). Vantage is intended for use by 1) Retailers 2) Show dealers 3) Fans who buy comics mainly for reading, but who also have an interest in the marketplace.

- Publisher Rob Golub

WE'VE GOT A LOT IN THE HOPPER

We may be a small publishing company, but boy do we have a lot going on all at once.

For months we've been working on our new magazine, **Starship Online**. **Starship Online** will be a paper magazine covering comics and sci fi on the Internet. We'll focus on the World Wide Web and on cool areas to visit on the commericial services. There are lots of successful Internet mags, but none (that we can find) for comics and sci fi. I can't tell you how exilherating it is to be invloved with something as forward-looking as Starship Online. I for one am bouncing off the walls, waiting to see what the first issue will look like in January

On the **Vantage Comic & Card Picks** front we are planning a relaunch. We'll be snazzing up the graphics a bit, while adding some new cool features here and there. The relaunch will also be designed to help people find us in their catalogs. Many people are now using **Previews** or **Advance Comics** for the first time and we want to make enough noise to ensure that everyone can find us in their new catalog-of-choice.

The **Vantage** World Wide Web site is live and kicking. Response had been really strong. We're drowning in contest entries, and a respected Internet paper magazine (The Net) recently devoted nearly a half-page of their news section to our site. Our "URL" web site address is http://www.insv.com/vantage

Finally, shipping soon from **Vantage** will be some signed **Magic: The Gathering** cards and **How To Sell At Shows** #1. We're working hard to make **How To Sell At Shows** #1 a quality product that will entertain and inform.

Pretty busy, eh? But hey, it's fun.

— Rob Golub
Publisher

VALIANT ONE-SHOT TO INCLUDE RARE MAGIC CARDS

Acclaim Comics will publish its first Magic-oriented comic book to be bagged with ***rare*** Magic: The Gathering collectible game cards. For months, **Vantage** has been carefully watching Acclaim solicitations for rare Magic cards, passing over books with common cards.

Magic: The Gathering — Homelands will be a 64-page one-shot based on the upcoming Homelands expansion card set for Magic: The Gathering. Although the Fallen Empire's set has experienced some market problems, Ice Age has been doing quite well, and **Vantage** expects continued strong performance for Magic projects for the foreseeable future. Wizards of the Coast continues to produce the cards slowly, rather than all at once, which keeps the market from becoming over saturated.

There are actually three Magic: The Gathering cards, one of which will be bagged with each issue. That is, each copy of **Magic: The Gathering — Homelands** will contain one of three randomly inserted, rare **Homelands** cards that can be used with any game of Magic. "Combined with the three rare cards we are including in the graphic novel, which respectively will defend, dominate, or destroy the universe, **Homelands** will be an indispensable addition to the universe of **Magic: The Gathering**," said Steve Massarsky, president of Acclaim Comics.

The three cards are not as useful in play as **Vantage** would like, though they will be rare:

Feroz's Ban, which defends Homelands from any wizard. To Magic players, this artifact will make them invulnerable to any spell for a limited amount of time.

Baron Sengir, a creature that will allow players to generate a vampire army — potentially a very powerful card.

Apocalypse Chime, which can be sounded to destroy the entire Homelands world. Players can use this card to annihilate any Homelands cards in play.

Aside from collectability issues, Homelands will likely attract many Magic players to pick up and read a Magic comic book for the first time. Acclaim has been producing beautiful, highly readable magic books, and these cards should give Acclaim's books some of the publicity they so deserve. **Vantage** suggests you read your Homelands book, don't just buy it for the cards. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Magic: The Gathering — Homelands is written by D.G. Chichester (**Daredevil**) and painted by Rebecca Guay (**Black Orchid**) with a cover by Greg and Tim Hildebrandt (**Star Wars** movie posters). It is due out in October.

Painting by Greg and tim Hildebrandt

NEW X-MEN AND SPIDER-MAN SERIES

UNLIMITED, CHEAP, AND NOT JUST FOR KIDDIES!

Marvel sure is slippery. Here's a pair of top picks that are easy to miss. We all know that the first few issues of a brand new Spider-Man or X-Men unlimited series can have serious potential. But many people have all but ignored the dollar books (actually, they're 99 cents each, but everyone's calling them "dollar books").

Marvel's dollar books had been eliciting remarks like, "Great idea, priced right to pull more kids into the hobby." In fact, it was that very attitude, that the dollar books were kiddie books, that kept initial orders relatively low.

The dollar books are well written, plotted on an adult level, with original story and art, and are about some of the hottest characters in Marvel's stable. The X-Men and Spider-Man dollar books retell the old stories, with new twists and information. All indications are that the dollar books will be part of current X-Men and Spider-Man continuity. The books are not drawn goofy, or in a cartoon style. The are drawn and written like most other Marvel books.

Fred Schiller, writer on **Professor Xavier and the X-Men,** calls his book a "retelling of the original series in today's time." Schiller points out that Stan Lee was still feeling the characters out when they wrote those early scripts. "These are the characters as we know them today," said Schiller.

He plans to "retell the original stories with a twist ... telling each issue through one particular character's point of view." He added, "There are slices of these character's lives that we have never experienced." Readers will get strong art and strong story for a mere buck a book. This is a deal no fan should miss.

At 99 cents a pop, the books have nowhere to go but up. Here's a worst case scenario for dealers: Throw the books in a fifty cent box. If you bought them at a wholesale rate you can still more or less break even!

It's difficult to imagine **Spider-Man** #1 or **Professor Xavier and the X-Men** #1 for 99 cents at dealers' tables several years down the road. This is a market where the consumer is used to paying $2 for a new comic anyway.

This X-Men™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

EXTREME STUDIOS PAYS TRIBUTE TO "BAD GIRLS"

In November, Extreme Studios flips their universe over by turning all of their male heroes into females.

The story begins in **Youngblood** as a female villain known as Diabolique, obsessed with the destruction of all men, casts a spell that turns all of the "super" men whom Glory has come into contact with into women.

"The deck is stacked in our favor on this one," said Extreme's Marketing Director Matt Hawkins. "This is our tribute to the 'bad girl' craze that seems to have mesmerized the comic industry over the last year. This is something that we feel people can really get behind and promote."

"One thing we definitely want to get across is that this is not a parody," added Extreme Editor Eric Stephenson. "Even though these scenarios are humorous in nature, the 'gender-bending' is absolutely real to these characters and each will react differently to the situations they are placed in. This storyline will have long lasting repercussions in all of our books, leaving at least one major character as a woman forever."

The titles where this "gender-bending" will be seen, in addition to **Youngblood**, are: **Bloodstrike, Chapel, Glory, Knightmare, NewMen, Prophet,** and **Supreme.**

Glory™ & © 1995 Rob Liefeld Inc. Avengelyne™ & © 1995 Rob Liefeld Inc. and Liefs Wolf Productions

Married To Vantage!

"Vantage gives me an advantage with my customers. It's excellent."
- Jan Sapp, Comic Chest, Virginia Beach, VA

"I read Vantage but I don't read Wizard™"
- Donald A. Sapp, Comic Chest, Virginia Beach, VA

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Wizard is ™ of Wizard Press

Perez Does I-BOTS FOR SIX MONTHS

Tekno•Comix has signed George Perez to draw Isaac Asimov's I-Bots for six months, **Vantage** has learned. Perez will pencil both the covers and the interiors, and Tekno hopes to keep him for another six months thereafter, sources tell us.

Isaac Asimov is perhaps the most powerful name to appear at the top of a Tekno book thus far. The late Asimov has a huge fan-following, and is widely recognized as perhaps the greatest science fiction author of all time.

Coupled with Asimov's name and ideas will be Perez's strong pencils. The pages that **Vantage** has seen are excellent — this is some of his best work ever.

Vantage foresees a real potential sleeper in this book. Many retailers have fallen into the habit of ordering only a handful of Tekno books. But the power of Asimov and Perez could quickly attract new readers.

In other Tekno news Walter Simonson has agreed to do a **Mike Danger** cover and Art Adams will be doing a **Primortals** cover.

Sample Artwork of Isaac Asimov's I-Bots by George Perez

MOTOWN TO PUBLISH THROUGH IMAGE

Motown, shmotown... who really gives a crap where they publish? **Vantage** does, and you should too. The name Motown may mean nothing to comic fans, but this company is a giant in the entertainment business. It dwarfs Image in size, and it has now signed a deal to publish comics through Image.

Motown will be publishing superhero books, with an eye towards using the characters in other media. Motown had originally come close to signing a deal with Marvel. In fact, a Motown representative had been promoting Motown products from behind the Marvel table at the New York Spectacular comic show last Winter.

The Marvel deal fell apart, and Motown and Image announced their new partnership in San Diego. Motown books will get an Image "i" on the cover. **Vantage** fears this may dilute the strength of the Image brand name — arguably the most powerful non-character brand in comics.

However, Image is probably picking up some nice cash from the deal, which will come in handy when battling giants like Marvel and Time/Warner. Overall, the deal is probably for the best, allowing Image to maintain its strength and presence in the marketplace.

How Motown will do remains to be seen. If they're smart, they'll place just a tiny Motown label on the books — and a giant Image "i."

THE NEW GODS GET STRONG CROSSOVER SUPPORT

The New Gods is being given a strong push through a variety of DC crossovers which could result in renewed demand for New Gods comics.

Look for appearances by Darkseid and other New Gods in high profile books to push up demand for this year's **The New Gods** #1-up, as well as for back issues. The high profile crossovers include appearances in **Superman, Wonder Woman,** and **Superman/Doomsday: Hunter/Prey, Darkseid vs. Galactus: The Hunger.**

The New Gods was originally a classic Kirby tale of good and evil. The first series lasted just nineteen issues over an eight year period in the 1970s. Two smaller miniseries came out years later. Darkseid has appeared in New Gods books from time to time.

In the new New Gods series that's now coming out, Jack Kirby's characters return for a new power struggle. Darkseid and his son Orion battle to the death. Darkseid dies, but DC sources indicate he is not being removed from the ongoing storyline by any means.

In essence, Darkseid grabs for power in a way that threatens not just the New Gods but the entire DC universe. His son Orion attempts to oppose his father's plan. Darkseid is killed in **The New Gods** #3, but this does not appear to resolve the conflict, which will somehow continue to spill over into the rest of the DC universe.

The New Gods artwork™ & © 1995 DC Comics

In **The New Gods,** New Genesis and Apokolips are two worlds risen from the ashes of an older order of gods. These worlds are separated by eternal struggle but bound together by a mysterious power known only as the Source.

The New Gods is being given a strong push by DC

SOVEREIGN SEVEN
SITS ON SOME SHELVES, ORDERS COULD DROP

Many retailers are reporting that extra copies of **Sovereign Seven** are sitting on their shelves and that they plan to drop orders for the book. This would likely affect **Sovereign Seven** #5 and thereafter, as well as the upcoming **Showcase '95** #12 appearance.

Vantage expects that this dip in orders may be only temporary. The art is strong and Claremont's usual web of intrigue is being spun. You may remember that at first the "new" X-Men were slow, and that it took some time for the industry to warm up to Claremont.

In a similar fashion, **Vantage** would not be surprised to see the book slow down, followed by a Maxx-style resurgence in demand. If this happens, look for these early Sovereign Seven appearances to grow in demand.

The formula for Sovereign Seven's future success is a dependable one: strong art, strong writer, and strong publisher. Show dealers with **Sovereign Seven** #5-15 and **Showcase '95** #12 in their back-issue bins could see brisk future sales to droves of happy customers.

BATMAN TO BATTLE CHILD ABUSE

Batman: The Ultimate Evil, an upcoming mini-series about the Dark Knight, focuses on child abuse and the Batman's battle with those who are guilty of it.

The story begins when Batman's eyes are opened to the horrors of child abuse by a social worker, leading him to do his own investigation. In the course of that investigation, he learns from Alfred that he isn't the first Wayne to wage the fight against child abuse; his mother did before him, and it may have led to her death.

What Batman discovers leads him to the Far East, and into a head-on confrontation with the chief purveyors of these crimes. Against these people — and nations — he wages an all-out war on those who would abuse children and treat them as merchandise. **Batman: The Ultimate evil** # 1 is due out October 17.

VERTIGO INTRODUCES INDUSTRIAL GOTHIC

Industrial Gothic tells the story of a world where beauty and fascism have become one and the same- and both are rigidly enforced. It is a place where you are either beautiful, or you become so through genetic enhancement. The alternative is to spend life locked away from the rest of the world. The story centers around two outcasts — a psychologically tormented man and his limbless mate — who do not conform to the stringent rules of the society, and thus seek to escape from it.

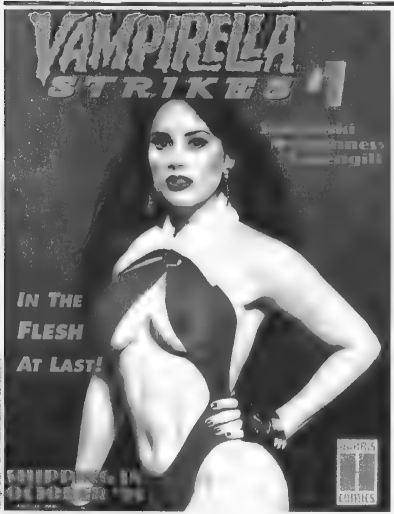
Industrial Gothic is a 5-issue miniseries written and drawn by Ted McKeever (**Extremist**) and is due out October 31.

HELLINA BEST-SELLING BLACK-AND-WHITE TITLE

Hellina™ & © 1995 Joseph A. Zyskowski

According to Lightning Comics, **Hellina** has been one of the top-selling black-and-white comics for quite some time, and for the month of July, **Hellina** was the best selling black-and-white comic.

Selling a black-and-white comic can be much harder to do because of the amount of color comics out there. **Hellina**, however, seems to ignore this trend. "**Hellina** sales have been increasing since the first issues were released in September of 1994, and it's not because it's a flashy, full-color, bad girl comic that's been heavily hyped. It's because **Hellina** has strong story lines and artwork. It's a strong, black-and-white title that's seeing a growing readership. Simply put, **Hellina** is selling because people enjoy reading it," says Steven Zyskowski, publisher of Lightning Comics.



Vampirella™ & © 1995 Harris Publications

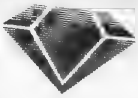
VAMPIRELLA STRIKES A PHOTOGRAPHIC POSE

The debut issue of Harris Comics **Vampirella Strikes** will feature a wrap-around photo cover of the sultry, real-life Vampirella.

"This is the first photo cover for a full-cover **Vampirella** comic, and it's sure to be a big hit with collectors. Vampirella is more popular than she's ever been in her twenty-five year history, so I can't think of a better way to kick off this all-new series, **Vampirella Strikes**," announced Associate Publisher and Editorial Director Meloney Crawford Chadwick.

In the first issue of the series, Vampirella teams with the seductive, supernatural vigilante, Passion, who first appeared in **Vengeance of Vampirella** #12 & 13.

IMAGE AND DARK HORSE CHOOSE DIAMOND



Diamond and Dark Horse have signed a formal agreement outlining an Exclusive Brokerage Arrangement between the two companies, starting with Dark Horse's September solicitations for November shipping products.

Furthermore, Diamond CEO Steve Geppi and Image CEO Rob Liefeld signed a detailed Letter of Intent agreeing in principle to an "Exclusive Brokerage Arrangement" between Image and Diamond, set to start with Image's December shipping products. Liefeld's Maximum Press, which is not part of Image, will be entering into an Exclusive Brokerage Arrangement with Diamond as well.

Like Diamond's new relationship with DC Comics, its future relationships with Image and Dark Horse will enable both publishers to set their own discounts and trade terms to retailers, while Diamond will earn a fee for handling various distribution and marketing services on the publishers' behalf.

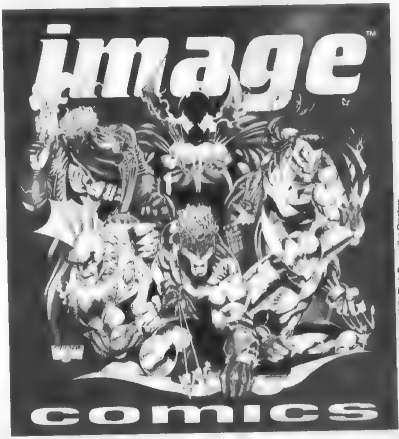
In making these announcements, Geppi said: "I want to thank Image and Dark Horse — and, of course DC Comics — for the confidence they've shown in my company. I especially want to thank all my employees — the Diamond Team! — for working hard, caring about the work they do, and helping to build a winner over the years! The rules of the game changed this year, but I know that I, and everyone here at Diamond, will do our very best to turn these changes into a new era of success for our industry."

Diamond Vice President of Purchasing Bill Schanes added: "We've said it before, but in light of this exclusive news, it bears repeating: Because we believe in a future where there's a comic book for everyone and everyone reads comics, Diamond, as in the past, will do all it can to preserve open access to the marketplace for all quality publishers and products."

Diamond Executive Vice President Chuck Parker concluded: "After all the effort that has gone into negotiating our new relationships, we at Diamond look forward to working with Dark Horse, Image, DC, and all our other suppliers—and especially our valued retail customers—for many, many successful years to come!"

"I want to thank Image and Dark Horse and, of course DC Comics for the confidence they've shown in my company."

Steve Geppi



All Image Characters™ & © 1995 By Their Respective Creators

DARK HORSE EXPLAINS IT'S DECISION

Dark Horse and Diamond Comic Distributors have announced an Agreement for an exclusive agency arrangement between the two companies.

The Agreement provides that Diamond will act as Dark Horse's sales agent to comic book specialty stores. The Agreement will be generally effective with Dark Horse's November shipping product.

"We've thoroughly researched and studied each of our options over the past several months," said Dark Horse founder and publisher Mike Richardson. "This has been a difficult situation, but because of recent industry upheaval, we felt compelled — not just for our own sake, but for the sake of retailers and the creators we work with, as well — to make a distribution choice. We held up our decision until we fully understood all of the potential ramifications and felt completely comfortable with our course of action."

Richardson continued: "We are very excited going into this new relationship with Diamond. We feel that this move will be good for Dark Horse; good for comics book retailers; good for the industry as a whole; and ultimately good for the consumer. This new arrangement should promote the availability of our publications, giving greater access of Dark Horse comics to current comics readers as well as the uninitiated."

"I am very excited by the prospect of working with Dark Horse Comics," said Diamond Comic Distributors President and CEO Steve Geppi. "Mike Richardson and his entire team possess a level of creativity and enthusiasm which bodes well for the future of our industry."

Mike Richardson also issued other statements on the Arrangement between Dark Horse and Diamond: *On Dark Horse's decision to go exclusive:* "The savings will be significant, giving Dark Horse the resources to work with comics retailers in new and exciting ways." *On the benefits of an exclusive relationship:* "Greater access to Dark Horse publications will be one of the key benefits of this new relationship.... If there are copies in print, retailers will have instant access by making a single phone call." *Regarding Dark Horse's decision to go with Diamond:* "Dark Horse chose Diamond as its distribution agent for a number of reasons: Diamond is currently selling to all retailers nationally as a result of their exclusive deal with DC Comics; Diamond has shown a greater propensity in the past toward promoting Dark Horse and the creators it works with; Diamond has the best operations and best staff; and finally, because Diamond has built a strong financial base that will best serve the publishers it distributes as we go forward into the future." ☆

> "We are very excited going into this new relationship with Diamond"
>
> Mike Richardson

Concrete™ & © 1995 Paul Chadwick

CAPITAL NABS KITCHEN SINK PRESS, VIZ COMICS, AND COPPERVALE

Capital City has announced an exclusive arrangement with Kitchen Sink Press, Viz Comics, and Coppervale Press. Capital will continue to carry other small publishers and producers of non-comic products.

Kitchen Sink is well known in the industry for printing graphic novels and trade paperbacks such as **Understanding Comics**, **Xenozic**, and **Crow**. Its catalog includes all of Will Eisner's graphic novels. Kitchen Sink, founded on 1969, is the oldest independant publisher.

Viz Comics publishes Japanese-style Manga comics and videos, a growing market in the industry. Viz is one of the largest "small" publishers. Coppervale, formerly Taliesin Press, publishes **Starchild** comic books. It is owned by the creator and his wife.

Capital City will be the only distributor offering Kitchen Sink Press products as of December. Viz goes exclusive in January and Coppervale goes exclusive in November.

Capital City is also reportedly close to announcing exclusives with other small comic book publishers. Having now lost approxomately 75% of the comic book market to Diamond and Marvel/Heroes World, Capital sources say they plan to rely increasingly on their strong gaming distribution network. Capital has already started to downsize from its current nationwide network of warehouses. Warehouses have been closing all over the nation.

Perhaps Marvel will be good enough to hire some former Capital warehouse people to get the Marvel distribution situation under control. Retailers continue to complain of Heroes World mistakes.

By signing exclusives, Capital apparently hopes to make ordering from them less of a hassel and more a necessity. The more exclusives Capital signs, the more retail accounts Capital can sign up and the more product Capital can sell in general. In any case, Diamond is now the preeminant distributor of non-Marvel books.

Logo™ & © 1995 Capital City

MTV PUMPS UP THE MAXX

The Maxx™ & © 1995 Sam Kieth

As **Vantage** had predicted, **The Maxx** is heating up quickly. The book had started out as just another pretty Image book, but the MTV animated cartoon has been making a difference. MTV fans have been scooping up **The Maxx** back-issues at the shows.

Creator-owner Sam Kieth is NOT one of the owners of Image — he's one of the rare guys who owns his own book, but through a special arrangement gets to have an "I" on his book. That little "I" can multiply sales dozens of times over.

The Maxx #1 travels briskly for five bucks in some parts of the country. If it wasn't so overprinted it would already be a twenty-dollar book (give it time — who knows?). The later issues, after about #5 or so, are rare. Printed after the initial launch and after the glut, these books are going to be quite difficult to find.

Dealers who have **The Maxx** in their fifty-cent boxes should go yank those suckers out fast. The ball is rolling for **The Maxx** and **Vantage** expects it to get bigger before it gets smaller.

The Maxx #21 kicks off a new story this Fall. The comic will jump ten years into the future to focus on Sarah's attempts to find her dad. Kieth says he didn't want to start with a new #1 because he didn't want to encourage collectors. The irony, of course, is that sticking with current numbering as the book heats up will focus people on the original first issues.

Since it looks like the show will be continued next year, current issues of **The Maxx** with $1.95 cover prices are probably pretty safe bets for dealers. The book is a pretty odd read too. If you are an odd individual, we suggest you give it a shot.

LEONARD NIMOY CO-PLOTS PRIMORTALS ORIGINS

Fans of **Leonard Nimoy's Primortals** will get a treat in November when the two-issue "origins" miniseries is released.

The mini is co-plotted by Nimoy himself and explores the beginnings of the **Primortals** history. Nimoy conceived of the **Primortals** idea while researching **Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home** and he has many long-term plans for the series.

Nimoy commented on some exciting events that will be upcoming: "Some very interesting political and social questions will be coming up in the near future as we get more and more into the interaction between Zeerus and the politicians and the press and the public," Nimoy said. "I think those threads have been very nicely, very intriguingly set up so far, and we have been entertained watching them set up. Now, before long, we will start to see more of the payoff of the pipeline that has been laid."

Leonard Nimoy's Primortals: Origins #1 is due out in November from Tekno•Comix. Issue #2 follows in December.

Cover Art to Primortals: Origins 2 by Arthur Adams

UNDERWORLD TO HAVE REPERCUSSIONS FOR MANY MONTHS TO COME

The villains pumped up by Underworld will be permanently enhanced, **Vantage** has learned. While after September or October DC may discontinue promoting books as Underworld "tie-ins," storylines tying in to Underworld will continue to take place.

Underworld is the ongoing storyline that begins with **Underworld Unleashed** #1-3 where a variety of DC villains are given super-charged powers.

With the huge amount of titles that refer back to **Underworld Unleashed** this Fall, and with future titles still referring back to it after October, **Vantage** foresees a classic funnel situation. That is, readers of dozens of separate books will be referred back to **Underworld Unleashed**. Thus, a relatively large number of fans will go looking for a relatively small number of books. With a large number being funneled into a small area, dealers can expect possible market reaction.

Lady Death Leather?

Vantage recently reported that Chaos was distributing a Lady Death leather cover and that **Vantage** was the only place to read about it. After the article ran, Chaos decided to publicize the leather cover.

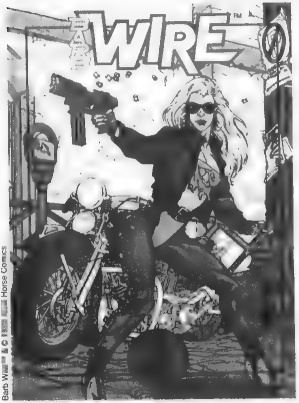
Vantage endeavors to bring its readers the most accurate and up-to-date information possible. We still consider the Lady Death leather cover a Top Pick of the Month. **Vantage** regrets the inaccuracy.

Acclaimed Artist Charles Vess To Self-Publish

Charles Vess, known for his work on titles like **Sandman** and **The Books of Magic**, will self-publish with **The Book of Ballads and Sagas.**

The Book of Ballads and Sagas will explore ancient tales of myth, magic, and folklore. A proposed six-issue miniseries, it will feature Vess' intricate pen-and-ink artwork and scripts by such authors as Neil Gaiman and award-winning mystery writer Sharon McCrumb.

Each story is hand-drawn, lettered, and edited by Charles Vess, and guaranteed to be straight from his heart.



Pamela Anderson Portrays Barb Wire

Pamela Anderson, best known for her roles on **Home Improvement** and **Baywatch**, will be bringing Dark Horse's **Barb Wire** to life on the big screen.

Anderson appeared in May at the Cannes film festival in France dressed in Barb Wire's skin-tight leathers and drove audiences crazy. As for her role in the film, Anderson smiled wickedly and said, "I blow away bodies without remorse."

Although the film is about six months away, the fan frenzy is building and the release of the movie is being eagerly anticipated. Anderson has appeared on shows like **Hard Copy** and graced the pages of **Star Magazine** and **The Hollywood Reporter** to promote her upcoming movie. Dark Horse Entertainment has a seventeen-film deal with Polygram Films International, of which **Barb Wire** is the first.

Hari Kari #0 Makes Diamond's Top 100

Blackout Comics announced that **Hari Kari** #0 was ranked in Diamond Distributors top 100 list for September. "This is the first title to break the top 100 for us and we are very pleased," said Blackout Publisher Bruce Schoengood.

Neil Gaiman's Teknophage Gets New Creative Team

Writer Paul Jenkins and artist Al Davison take over **Teknophage** for its second story arc, starting with issue #7.

"Jenkins and Davison have a really good handle on the steam-driven inner workings of Kalighoul," said Ed Polgardy, Editor-in-Chief of Tekno•Comix. "And we're really delighted with the proposal that was submitted by them. Teknophage continues to be a book that pushes the envelope, especially in terms of its imaginative storylines and sophisticated storytelling techniques. I can't wait to hear what people think of Jenkins' and Davison's take on the series."

Neil Gaiman's Teknophage #7 is due out in October.

Blackout Comics Goes For The Jugular With New Talent

Blackout Comics announced that some top industry talents will be working on its newest title, **Jugular**.

Among the talent are: penciler Neil Vokes (**Mask**, **Spider-Man**); writer Mike Baron (**Nexus**); inker Michael Avon Oeming (**Judge Dredd**); and artist Christopher Moeller (**Star Wars**), who will paint the cover to **Jugular**.

"We are very excited to have these outstanding artists in addition to Mike Baron, who is hailed as one of the industry's finest writers," said Bruce Schoengood, Publisher of Blackout Comics.

Jugular is a modern tale about vampires and is due out in December.

Exiles Plot Parallels X-Men

In **The All New Exiles** #1, the **Exiles** find themselves in the middle of the mass destruction plaguing the Ultraverse and thought to be the cause of it.

The team discovers that they are being blamed for the chaotic happenings of Black September, and stalked by opposing forces. Unable to lead normal lives, they go into hiding. (Sound a little X-familiar?)

"The X-characters are used to a different universe from the Ultraverse," explained Editor Roland Mann. "In addition to their varying personalities, the shift in universes is going to create some interesting conflicts both within the group and outside." Mann also said the group will be "hated, hunted, maligned, and all around despised" in the world of the Ultraverse. (Cough — X-Men theme — Cough!)

The All New Exiles #1 is due out in October with a cover price of $1.50. It is a Vantage Top Pick of the Month.

The Man Of Steel Goes On Trial

Superman: The Man of Steel #50 features the beginning of "The Trial of Superman."

Thanks to the Parasite, Superman is drained of his powers and forced to stand trial for the destruction of Krypton. After he is found guilty, he is imprisoned with thousands of other interstellar criminals, forced to endure the consequences of a jail break, and faces certain death in the nebula laden with Kryptonite that was once his home.

Guest stars include Superboy, Supergirl, Steel, and Alpha Centurion, but even they may not be enough to save the Man of Steel. Writer Louise Simonson, along with artists Jon Bogdanove and Dennis Janke, bring the "Trial of Superman" story to exciting life. **Superman: The Man of Steel** #50 is a 48-page issue and is due out in September.

Superman™ & © 1995 DC Comics

November Tekno Comic Books To Come With Free Back Issue

November marks Tekno•Comix' one-year anniversary, and to celebrate it, Tekno is polybagging it's November issues and including a free back issue in them.

In essence, what this means is that customers will be getting two comics for the price of one. To top that off, one out every ten issues will include a gold-plate signature Tekno comic from the first three titles published, namely: **Leonard Nimoy's Primortals, Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero — The Newmatic Man,** and **Gene Roddenberry's Lost Universe.**

Primortals will feature a gold-plated autograph from Leonard Nimoy; **Mr. Hero** will feature the same by Neil Gaiman; and **Lost Universe** will feature the gold-plated autograph of Majel Barrett Roddenberry. Look for these titles and their free issues in November from Tekno•Comix.

Entity And Zen Part

Entity Comics has not renewed its license to publish comics featuring the character Zen which is owned by Steven Stern's Zen Comics. Fusion studios will now create Zen comic books. A new publisher has yet to be chosen, though Stern says several are under consideration.

The first project from Fusion Studios will be **Manga Zen**. It will be illustrated by Orbeta and written by **Zen Intergalactic Ninja** co-creator Steve Stern. The same team will also be producing a "cyber-manga" title called **Shygirl**.

High Impact Studios Card Set

High Impact Studios reports that they have entered into an agreement with Comic Images for the production of a 90-card all-chromium set. The set will feature the characters China and Jazz, from the company's highly successful Double Impact comic book. The company is considering an aggressive market-oriented sales plan for the cards that **Vantage** has been asked not to release at this time. We're talking something that has never been done. We'll keep you posted.

Fusion Studios To Do Manga

Fusion Studios, a new studio formed by acclaimed artist Joel Orbeta, plans to publish comics that combine elements of American and Japanese comics.

"We're dedicated to producing a new breed of comics that combines the best of manga and mainstream books," said Orbeta. "Anime and manga are the cutting-edge of world pop culture, and U.S. comics are ready and waiting for this blast of adrenaline," he continued.

Capcom And White Wolf Announce Alliance

Capcom Entertainment and White Wolf Publishing have announced that the two have formed a deal whereby Capcom will publish computer and video game products based on White Wolf properties.

Capcom will develop the game products based on White Wolf's **World of Darkness** game setting. The first product planned for video games is **Werewolf: The Apocalypse,** and Capcom is looking forward to its development. "Capcom has always been about exploring the borders of the imagination, and White Wolf recognizes that those borders are limited only by the timidity of the mind," said Greg Ballard, President of Capcom Entertainment.

Double Impact™ & ® 1995 High Impact

Lady Death™ & © 1995 Brian Pulido

signed

BY SCOTT BARNETT

limited

UNDER 2000 CARDS!

$17.50

ARE WE CRAZY???

Vantage has made special arrangements to subsidize the costs of producing signed cards — we are passing the savings on to you, our valued customers! Don't ever pay $30-$60 for a signed card again! *Vantage Signature Series* cards are signed and strictly limited to unfathomably low quantities, and are truly affordable! The catch? There's two of 'em:

1) You must use the coupon provided– no copies.
2) If we receive over 2000 orders we will return checks at random (sorry, we have no choice)!

OFFER EXPIRES NOV. 15, 1995.

cards you want...

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Signature Series

LADY DEATH CHROMIUM CARD

☐ Yes, I'd like *Lady Death Chromium Card*, personally signed by artist Scott Barnett, limited to 2000 produced by **Vantage**, with accompanying certificate of authenticity! I understand that if **Vantage** receives orders for over 2000 copies, my coupon and money may be selected at random to be returned (I will receive a full refund).

Enclosed is $17.50 + $1.00 (shipping)= $18.50 total
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Please send check or money order with this coupon (no copies) to:

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13000 W. Blue Mound Road, #110
Elm Grove, WI 53122

NON-SPORTS PICKS

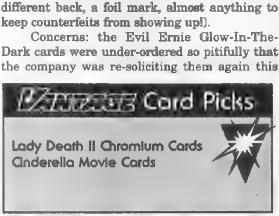
Bad Girl, Part Two

Last year **Vantage** heralded the first Lady Death card set, and the boxes are now moving at wholesale for nearly double the original price. Can we expect to see this happen again? Well, maybe~ Similar to last year, Krome Productions has managed to find a month when neither Marvel nor WildStorm is putting out a major card release, but even without competition it is possible that dealers will again order too few boxes to meet the demand. The list of artists reads like a who's who of popular folks, and a lot of brand new art is being done for the cards (which is a big relief to **Vantage**, since we aren't usually too thrilled with cards that simply reprint available artwork). In addition to five chromium chase cards, there is a three-card triptych set by Jim Balent, and anybody who gets one of these cards is simply gonna insist on the other two (that's the magic of Triptychs ~ ya gotta see the whole picture!).

There will be 500 autograph cards inserted through the entire run, and we hope that this time there's something to authenticate them (a different back, a foil mark, almost anything to keep counterfeits from showing up!).

Concerns: the Evil Ernie Glow-In-The-Dark cards were under-ordered so pitifully that the company was re-soliciting them again this month, which may indicate a drop-off in interest in cards. **Vantage**, however, merely thinks this is the difference in the appeal of Lady Death versus Evil Ernie.

Lady Death ™ & © 1995 Adam Hughes



Rocky Horror ™ & © 1975, 1995 Twentieth Century Fox

Sneak Warning: dealers who initially order a case of the cards will receive a special two-card case bonus which features two exclusive frame-size chromium cards, and you can expect them to disappear right away. Start pestering your dealer NOW for his set, and if he doesn't have one coming go find a store that does!

Fairy Tales Can Come True~

Disney is releasing Cinderella to video this Fall, and SkyBox is there to help with the Cinderella Movie Foil boxes. There is a ninety-

card set, augmented with pop-ups (one per pack) and two insert sets (which are still a secret at this point). In addition, there is a binder available that most little girls of all ages will want for their cards.

The sales for this set can be expected to be brisk, but a word of caution: when Pocahontas came out there were special packs at a certain large retail outlet that sold for only fifty cents each and contained the pop-ups and all the chase card sets – if this happens again, bail out immediately!

(*&&#^$%(#&$ Factory Set

Vantage hates factory sets – they kill the value of the sets, packs, and boxes of cards that they are released for, and usually come too late to do anything more than annoy the die-hard collectors who have already picked up all the cards the hard way. Of course, they are a great buy for the consumer if they jump in at the right time–

The Image Universe Factory Tin Set boasts

Vantage hates factory sets. They kill the value of the sets, packs, and boxes of cards that they are released for, and usually too late to do anything more than annoy the die hard collectors who have already picked up all the cards the hard way.

Star Wars & characters ™ & © 1995 Lucasfilms

a complete set of the cards, all eighteen chase cards, a neat collector's tin, and the #0 card that you can't get anywhere else. Prices should fluctuate between $50 and $100, so strike when you see a dealer sitting on a few tins that aren't moving.

A Slightly More Potent Force

Topps is releasing their first frame-size card set for Star Wars – 36 different cards that measure 6.5 inches by 10 inches. Apparently a box will simply contain a complete set, with no chase cards or any potential bonus cards.

When the sets first ship, scan one immediately to see if the frame-size card that was included in Star Wars Galaxy Magazine issue 2 is included; if not, demand for this "promo" card will skyrocket. Finding copies of it might prove easier than you think; that's the same issue that contained the X-Files ashcan, and a lot of dealers have opened the magazine to get the ashcan – you may be able to buy what's left in the magazine (a chromium card, the frame-size card, and the magazine itself) for very little money. In fact, you might start looking for them a little bit early–

Seasons' Greetings

The card releases in October may remind you of a little problem that most retailers seem to

be having lately: confusion over just what season it is.

Oh sure, we get the Hammer Horror cards from Cornerstone Communications – cards featuring promos for the horror movies, stills from the shows, and a horrific chase card set. This may be a niche market, but it will make some collectors ecstatic.

And FPG is bringing out the J. K. Potter cards, complete with artwork that Stephen King claims, "Actually assault the eye." This set may be the first in a while that is simply too scary for younger viewers, but again, given the season, there should be a ready audience.

But in addition, we get reminders that the Christmas displays will be up in time for Halloween: Santa & Snowflakes cards from TCM, Christmas 1995 cards from Fleer, and Santas of Old from 21st Century Archives.

TCM put out the Santa Around the World cards last year, and while a few people may have picked up packs for stockings, they were mostly greeted with yawns. This year they try harder, with no fewer than four kinds of chases – it probably won't help much.

Art ™ & © 1995 Chris Achilleos

Rocky Horror ™ & © 1975, 1995 Twentieth Century Fox

Fleer tried hitting the holiday market with the Easter cards earlier this year, and these cards will have a familiar ring – each pack has a set of cards that tell one of six Christmas stories, and from time to time a pack will have a gold chase card.

Santas of Old will have a fifty-card set divided up into packs, and a chase set of five foil-stamped comic panels that we doubt will ever be put together by many consumers. At least there is a sense of satire to these cards – they feature lots and lots of pictures of Santa being used

Batman & Catwoman ™ & © 1995 DC Comics

in advertisements.

Quote the **Vantage**, "Bah, humbug to early Christmas cards."

The Art Gallery

Comic Images is releasing a set that they could have called "Past Beyond Bizarre," the Salvador Dali chromium cards. These will not appeal to the normal art collector, but if you can get those who appreciate fine art to simply look at these cards you'll have an easy sell. Chases will include the dreaded MagnaChrome cards (can they please go away, pretty please?), 24-Karat Gold Signature cards, a three-card MagnaChrome set (whimper), and the ever-popular Medallion cards.

FPG has the latest in their frame-size card releases, the Chris Achilleos Colossal cards. The fifty-card set again features no chase cards, but there will be a real autographed card in each box, so it may be cheaper to buy a box than a set and the autographed card.

Speculative Corner

Some things in life are institutions that seem to simply always be there ~ the Post Office, the IRS, and the ever-popular Rocky Horror Picture Show. That's right, perhaps the longest-running weekly film ever produced, RHPS has now swept its way onto cards courtesy of Comic Images. Just in time for the 20th anniversary of the movie's original release comes a 90-card set featuring shots from the movie (no word on whether the backs of one of the cards shows the steps to the TimeWarp). Six chromium chase cards and an occasional medallion card fill out the collection; rice and water guns must be provided by the purchaser.

Quick Notes

Authentix continues its line of mostly ignored comic strip cards with B.C. cards this month ~ again, people can order sets (including the chase cards) instead of boxes, or buy packs hoping to find redemption cards for oversize cards (of course, these are also available as a separate buy, so buying packs makes even less sense).

An Australian import is the Nickelodeon Ren & Stimpy cards from Dynamic Marketing. These cards are always popular (especially with little girls), and there is a binder that true fanatics will simply have to have.

The DC Villains cards are barely starting to gather dust, and SkyBox is already releasing the DC Villains II : Underworld set. These are coming out in conjunction with the (yawn) DC Underworld crossover from this Fall. Try not to trip over them on the way by.

SkyBox is releasing something that could have been a contender ~ the Mortal Kombat movie cards. We've said it before, and we'll say it again ~ movie cards have to come out with the movie, not four to six weeks later. Likely to arrive already DOA.

Finally, there is a WildStorm Binder this month ~ not connected to anything, simply a binder with a great piece of wraparound art. There are a few completists who will want it, and they'd better order it ahead of time or they'll probably miss it!

COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

By Rich Keller

Ladies and gentlemen, **Vantage** readers of all ages, direct your attention to the center ring please. The author of this fine, upstanding, grammatically correct feature is about to make an announcement. An announcement so big that nations will declare holidays around it. So big that Hugh Grant, Michael Jackson, and that O.J. guy will disappear from the headlines.

Please, he must have utter silence for this announcement. Here we go . . .

I'm on the Internet.

This is where the cheers and adulation would be placed. The doves of peace would be released, a joyous rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus would ring from the ceilings. Yes it's true fans. Now you can send your stuff to me via that wonder of modern technology: electronic mail. All you have to do is email me at **Hyperstat@aol.com**. Of course if you're a pagan and still don't own a computer you can always mail me via the U.S. postal service.

And now, direct your attention to the far ring, as **Vantage** presents this month's reader picks.

Crib Death & Other Bedtime Stories

Aardwolf Publishing

$7.95

The book is a compilation of six stories that combine the Twilight Zone with Alfred Hitchcock Presents. And while it is horror...

It's always cool (not to mention hip, groovy and neato) when comic book writers step from under their word balloons to compose works that don't involve men and women in tights. Writers like Peter David, who's been writing Star Trek novels for years, and Chris Claremont, who's written a number of science fiction and fantasy stories. When they have the opportunity to write one or two hundred pages, rather than just script 22, it really shows the depth and imagination of these people.

So imagine my pleasure when Clifford Lawrence Meth called the expansive **Vantage** offices in beautiful Elm Grove, Wisconsin to ask if we would review his new collection of short horror stories. Of course Rob Golub, being the warm-hearted, generous, compassionate man

he is said no problem to this *[I think I'm gonna puke —Rob]*.. And thanks to Mr. Meth and the U.S. Postal Service, I am able to review **Crib Death & Other Bedtime Stories** this month.

Sent to us by the fine people over at Aardwolf Publishing, the book is a compilation of six stories that combine the Twilight Zone with Alfred Hitchcock Presents. And while it is horror, it's not material that will give you nightmares at night. That is if your one of those millions of people who has been desensitized to violence by the manipulative media giants. Whoops, I'm babbling again aren't I?

Anyway, the stories in this book are very diverse. Each examines a different type of horror or macabre. For example, 'The A**hole Syndrome' (I added the stars, you can probably fill in the blanks) shows the consequences when science tries to conquer a natural human trait. 'The Poet' touches on the subject of lust and obsession and how far one will go to obtain love. 'Crib Death' is the touching story of horror in marriage. And when you think that you've found out what the end of the story will be, Clifford throws a monkey wrench into it all and gives you an ending you wouldn't have expected.

For those people out there who go through withdrawal when words aren't followed by pictures, don't worry. Each story includes black & white illustrations from some of the top names in comics. For instance, 'The A**hole Syndrome' is illustrated by former X-Men dude Dave Cockrum. 'Max' is drawn by Paul Abrams. The pictures don't tell the story as much as they give it perspective. All the artists leave the storytelling up to Meth.

Comics are the greatest way to escape from everyday worries, but sometimes the heroes and plots start to combine together. That's when it's time to take a break. When you do, grab some Crib Death.

Blame it, or give credit to, Walt Disney. He did it. When he decided to release 'Steamboat Willie' in 1928 he created a craze that goes on even to this day. No, I'm not talking about everyone wearing Mickey Mouse ears. I'm talking about Anthropomorphics. Or to us commoners: animals that have human characteristics. From Mickey, to Bugs, to Sonic the Hedgehog, funny animals have graced our television sets as well as our comic books for decades.

In recent times, anthropomorphic books have taken on a more serious, adult side to their storytelling: books like **Fritz the Cat** and **Omaha, the Cat Dancer**. **Tall Tails** from Golden Realm Unlimited continues this fine tradition.

Created by Jose Calderon and Daphne Lage, the story involves two kingdoms, their greatest knights, a crown prince, and the quest to retrieve a Seal of Iberion. While that goes on, they must battle evil kings, nasty bandits and of course the ever-present trolls (They're everywhere you know). It's a combination of Magic: The Gathering, and an Indiana Jones adventure. Lage said that this project was over six years in the making, but the wait was well worth it because the story flows very smoothly from issue to issue. In addition, the characters are very well defined to the point that after issue one you think you've known them for

> The story involves two kingdoms, their greatest knights, a crown prince, and the quest to retrieve a Seal of Iberion. There ain't no bunnies or ducks in this group.

ages.

And speaking about the characters, there ain't no bunnies or ducks in this group. But there are lions, tigers, and bears (Oh My! *Sorry, had to do it.*) as well as foxes, rhinos and wild boar. See a trend here? In the real world these animals aren't waiting around to be picked off, they're the ones who are doing the hunting and killing.

Lage was quite ingenious when she connected characters to animals. For example one of the knights, E.F. Ravenwood, is a fox, one of the most cunning animals around. His cohort Gabriel is a peaceful and wise panda bear but can also snap a man's neck in an instant. Have you every seen an angry panda at the zoo? Not too cuddly then, huh?

Swords, magic and alot of fur. That's what you'll get when you pick up a copy of **Tall Tails** at your local comic shop. Now excuse me, I've got to meet my cat and his friends at the bar.

THE 25 MOST UP AND COMING CREATORS IN COMICS

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ANNUAL LOOK AT THE MOST UP AND COMING PEOPLE IN COMICS! WHAT IS AN UP-AND-COMER? AN UP-AND-COMER IS A CREATOR WHO COULD GET QUITE A BIT MORE ATTENTION FROM THE FANS SOON.

YOU CAN BE AT ANY LEVEL IN YOUR CAREER. SOME UP-AND-COMERS ARE WELL-ESTABLISHED CREATORS WHO ARE ABOUT TO WALK INTO AN EVEN BRIGHTER SPOTLIGHT. OTHERS ARE YOUNG WHIPPERSNAPPERS WHO CAN DRAW CIRCLES AROUND THEIR PEERS.

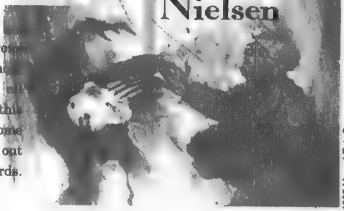
THESE ARE SOME OF THE NAMES YOU'LL BE SEEING MORE AND MORE OF IN THE COMING MONTHS. NOW YOU CAN NOTICE A NAME IN YOUR COMIC, POINT IT OUT TO YOUR FRIENDS, AND LOOK LIKE YOU KNOW WHAT THE HECK YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

TERRY DODSON

This talented artist began work as a regular penciler on Malibu's **Mantra,** as well as later working on **Teen Titans** for DC and on Dark Horse's Comics Greatest World titles. Also look for Dodson's work on **Excalibur, X-Men,** and **X-Men Chronicles** for Marvel and **WildC.A.T.s** for Image. Dodson is also now working on an upcoming Storm miniseries.

Cliff & Terry Nielsen

These two painted **Ruins** and [illegible] reputed to have been in stro[illegible] demand at the San Diego sh[illegible] Publishers were wooing the duo with all sorts of sweetheart offers. Look for the pair of artists alone and together on some of the highest-profile projects coming out next year, including **X-Files** trading cards.



William Messner-Loebs

This guy has been writing great comics for ages, but boy is he about to heat up more than ever. This is a serious right place / right time situation, as Messner-Loebs is about to find himself working on three of the hottest books in the nation all at the same time: **Requiem** (staring Wonder Woman's Artemis), **The Maxx,** and **Thor** (with Deodato). 'Nuff Said.

X-Men, Punisher & Ruins ™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group

SCOTT BARNETT

Barnett is a young new artist who has yet to sign on with anyone for regular work, but boy does he get great one-shot assignments. He's already done a Lady Death pin-up for the swimsuit special, a Lady Death trading card, an Angela pin-up for McFarlane, a Razor pin-up for London Night Studios, a Shi trading card, and a Lady Rawhide piece for Topps. Watch out for serious heat if anyone ever manages to sign this guy up for monthly cover work! Check out the cover to this very mag for a smokin' example of his work.

Dwayne Turner

Sovereign Seven comes to life through his detailed pencils. The pages are real masterpieces. He definitely stands out from the crowd of DC artists who sometimes seem to stick to a house style. As **Sovereign Seven** builds a following, look for Turner to gain in stature.

Sovereign Seven ™ & © 1995 Claremont & Turner. Batman & Catwoman ™ & © 1995 DC Comics.

Stefan Petrucha

The X-Files, hardly an easy book to helm, is written extremely well with original, captivating storylines that pull the reader in and don't let go until the end. Petrucha's career has taken off like a rocket, thanks to his ability to truly capture the flavor of the X-Files TV show.

Fred Schiller

This guy is the writer on what could turn out to be one of the hottest new books introduced this year. The X-Men dollar book is NOT just another **X-Men Adventures** kiddie's book, its only a buck, and it hits a market over saturated with high-priced titles and too many X-Men books. Initial reports are that retailers are ordering it like a regular X-Men book.

SAM KIETH

He brought us the Maxx and his creation is now a star on MTV. Already an established artist, look for the Maxx to heat up even more and for Kieth to heat up along with it.

DREW HAYES

Poison Elves looks better and has been showing up in a lot more stores since Hayes brought this creator-owned title to Sirius. Hayes is a great comic book creator, relying on the pictures to tell the tale, not the words.

J. SCOTT CAMPBELL

His pencils have rocketed **Gen 13** to the top of the fan-favorites list and he is definitely one of the people that keeps WildStorm in the public eye. He has merged Japanese-style Manga with American "bad girls" for the perfect look. If he should ever leave **Gen 13**, keep an eye out for where he ends up.

JIM LEE

Yes, Jim Lee. No, we are not incredibly stupid. Yes, we know he is already considered one of the top artists in the business, but he's been so busy with the business of comics that he hasn't had time to draw comics. Jim Lee's impending return to drawing comics will rebuild his huge fan-following. Lee is scheduled to pencil **Gen 13 #6** and **#7**. Afterwards he plans to pencil and write a monthly book! The title has yet to be announced. Look for a renewed interest in Lee's early X-books.

LUKE ROSS

Here's a new artist who can draw just about any kind of style. His agent touts him as the "next big star." Ross can do the Image style quite well actually. He's penciling and doing covers for DC's new **The New Gods.** Read our articles in this issue for the juicy details on why **The New Gods** is the place to be.

MICHAEL LOPEZ

WildStorm discovered this guy at a recent convention. One of his first published works was the **Gen 13 #1** lingerie cover. Remember how incredible that thing was? Not bad for a first try, eh? His first full book will be **Vodoe/Zealot: Skin Trade,** a 48-page book shipping in the last week of August. WildStorm has clearly made a serious discovery here!

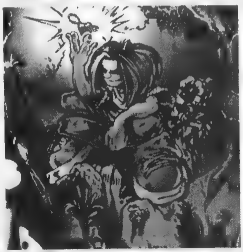
Gen 13 ™ & © 1995 Aegis Ent. Inc. dba Wildstorm Prod., 1995.

Mario and Michael Ortiz

These two brothers draw like top-notch Image talent. No kidding, they really are that good, even though they are working for just a tiny baby of a brand new publisher. Mushroom Comics, whose logo features — get this — a nuclear mushroom cloud, is publishing the Ortiz brothers' **Araknis.** Although the art is truly beautiful, **Vantage** wonders if consumers will go for a superhero with six Doc Oc tentacles. But what seems corny at first glance starts to look a lot better after you start reading. This is an interesting story of good versus evil. The main character basically shares his own body with the devil. He talks to himself, arguing over what is right or wrong as the action takes the story forward. Intelligent use of word balloons and lettering makes this odd concept work. **Araknis** is recommended. Check out the first issue which is likely still on some store racks now. **Vantage** knows one thing for certain. Whether fans go for Araknis or not, the Ortiz brothers are destined to become stars in the comics business.

Stuart Immomen

This guy is one of a select group of artists who would be setting the comics world on fire if it were not for the fact that they're stuck on books with low print runs and therefore low fan attention. **Vantage** first noticed Immomen's distinctive style on DC's **Legion of Super Heroes** and frankly wondered why he remained on a book with rather low readership. Perhaps because of its pre-**Zero Hour** low sales, he was given lots of artistic freedom to flex and grow. To try and pigeonhole his style is impossible. He shows hints of Adam Hughes in his realistic-looking people, plus plenty of influence from many Silver Age greats thrown in, most notably Curt Swan. Then there are his exquisite faces of women, and his masterful use of shadowing. **Vantage** has followed Immomen to **Adventures of Superman,** where his work has been somewhat erratic and not up to the quality of his **Legion** days. **Vantage** does see great potential though, and with the right book, he may yet set the comics world on fire.



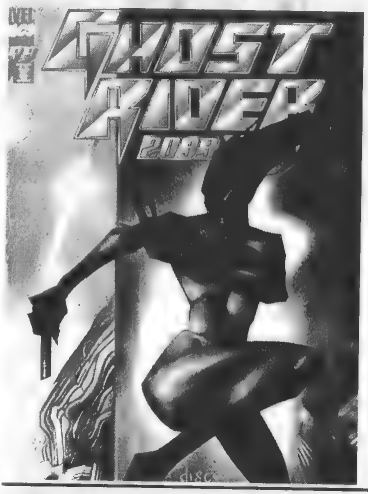
Araknis ™ & © 1995 Ortiz Bros. Creed ™ & © 1995 Trent Kaniuga.

Trent Kaniuga

He has created a new "Creed" of hero that looks sure to become a big hit and could possibly set a new trend in the industry. His artwork is unlike anything else out there. Now that Trent's famous, his job packing groceries just hasn't seemed as appetizing. "I did quit my job," he admitted, "I've been getting a lot more job offers. I paid off my car." In addition to his **Creed** work, Trent's been doing covers for small publishers like Hall of Heroes and Homegrown Studios.

Humberto Ramos

Having started off slowly with the pencils on **Superboy** #9-10, Ramos has found his niche with **Impulse.** His work is unique, containing hints of Manga while maintaining a personal style. Ramos' strength lies in his subtle detail, especially evident on faces. It's hard making a book like **Impulse** work art-wise due to all the double takes and strange looks the characters give one another, but Ramos pulls it off beautifully. Ramos cuts loose with some great sight gags and caricatures involving the other characters.



James Daly and Ashley Wood

These two artists give **Ghost Rider 2099** a gritty look without just swiping Texeira. Deeply dark panels suck the reader into a surreal world that doesn't let go for thirty-two pages. **Vantage** wonders what the future of **Ghost Rider 2099** will be with the regular Ghost Rider title canceled. To give Daly and Wood the fan base they deserve, **Vantage** hopes to see them on other projects in the future.

Impulse ™ & © 1995 Humberto Ramos. Ghost Rider ™ & © 1995 DC Comics.

Andrew Bates

Besides working for Capital City as a customer service rep Bates is a uniquely talented artist. His art is quirky, reminding **Vantage** of 'Ringo, but it's not just a rip-off. He only recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in Illustration. With a style all his own, Bates hopes to land a regular penciling job at one of the big publishers. His only published comic book work to date is a compilation of comic strips called **Buy This Book Or The Vulture Gets It** with a print run of 1,000. Bates says his favorite thing about the comic book business is that "fans are part of the whole industry." He points out that the people who read comics are the ones who create them, "and that's a really cool thing."

Pavlet art ™ & © 1995 Terry Pavlet.

Terry Pavlet

Besides doing the cover and logo for **Vantage's** upcoming **Starship Online** #0, Pavlet's current projects include cards for Mach Force 7 (due out in January), various covers for Milennium, and Star Wars for West End Games. Pavlet has done work for Hanna Barbera, Coke, and McDonald's, but he wants to start doing more work in comics. He says, "Where imagination ends, I begin. I always take the extra step, no matter how big or how small the client. I'm a cover artist. Hopefully, I could start working for the larger companies." Look for **Riders of the Ebony Night** from Millennium on the racks right now.

Steve Busti

It's back to basics with this young creator. Busti writes and draws select titles for Flashback Comics. The books are exquisite throw-backs to those old Kirby monster books. These are some of the most enjoyable reads being published today. Busti's writing is wonderfully entertaining and the art is perfectly crafted to take you back to the good old days.

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Taking It Personally

by Len Strazewski

I expected the rafters to be hung with black crepe paper and the attitude to be glum. After all, comics industry statistics have been bad enough to turn the summer comic book conventions into wakes.

Since 1993, comics sales have dropped from a high of about $1 billion to about $500 million and the number of comic shops have decreased from more than 6,000 to 3,500 or so. The best and the strongest stores are still around but the small stores with minimal capitalization have succumbed to falling sales and too much product. Small publishers have come and gone and even the largest publishers have cut back on the number of titles they produce. The big hits of the last few years that sold a million copies or more have shrunk back to former levels. Some have dropped to record lows.

Not a great time to be in the business of creating or selling comic books and I expected that the big conventions in Chicago and San Diego would be subdued and diminished. I expected that writers, artists, editors, and publishers would gather in the hotel bars after show hours, swap war stories and drink a toast to the comic and card speculators whose investments funded many a new house for comic book creators. Mark Waid might even do a few magic tricks.

I was wrong.

The publisher booths were a little smaller than last year but certainly not less glitzy. Maybe the DC Comics booth didn't seem to stretch for miles like it did in 1994, but it made up for less space with more video displays and freebies for fans.

Marvel's mini-Manhattan seemed a few feet short but was even more like New York City ~ cramped and bustling. Even the addition of Malibu Comics displays were crammed into a corner, like a Three-Card Monte dealer near a subway entrance. Tekno~Comix didn't bring the virtual reality display this year, but had lots of giveaways for fans. Harris Comics has a new Vampirella with~ahem~even more to offer that the old one.

Attendance seemed a little down to me even though the Con managements reported record admissions. Fans were no less enthusiastic as they chased down autographs and chats with their favorite creators. Still, I detected some significant changes. More business, less carnival. More toys, cards, games, and multimedia, fewer comic books. More marketers and publishers' reps, and fewer creators. More private parties, fewer casual chats with fans in the booths, lobbies, and bars.

The overall atmosphere was tense and publishers seemed to focus on business rather than creative issues. Dark Horse, Image, and Acclaim announced exclusive distribution deals with Diamond Distribution. Retail reps circulated among their best comic shop customers, assuring them that everything would get better as soon as the new deals kicked in. Marketing reps in head sets walked around the big publisher booths and one of the most common expressions heard at the DC, Marvel, and Image booths was, "Please don't

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> I was wrong.

Artists and writers spent a lot of their time talking to editors about new projects and the news wasn't good. No one wants to take a chance on a new project.

block the aisles. You've got to stay in line."

Spawn Toys, Ultraverse action figures, Marvel cartoon shows, Batman and Superman live-action productions, and Wizards of the Coast card games were hot. Image, Marvel and DC comic books (except ***Flash*** and ***Wonder Woman***) were not. Even Jeff Smith's **Bone**, the big hit of 1994 cooled off and the Bad Girl comics (**Shi, Lady Death**, etc.) were dragged down by a dozen imitators. Many of the big names in comics skipped the conventions entirely.

The Image owners passed on the Chicago convention completely since it conflicted with Rob Liefeld's wedding. John Byrne, poised for a major comeback with **Wonder Woman** and Alex Ross, still riding high after **Marvels**, skipped the San Diego convention. Publishers paid for fewer writers and artists to attend. A lot of veteran creators couldn't afford the time or the travel expense, even though they needed to network to replace jobs that were lost when titles were canceled. Fewer creative teams were invited to autograph. Malibu writers and artists weren't even invited to sign at the Marvel booth. If a writer or artist wanted a place to sit, he or she had to buy table space.

The big names who did show put in their time in the autograph areas and signed until the long lines were satisfied, but then disappeared off to private dinners and invitation-only parties. Party locations were quiet secrets and passes were issued to creators with hot projects and retailers with great track records. If fans wanted to have an extended chat with a writer or artist, they were generally out of luck unless they staked out a panel discussion and captured their favorite in a corner until he or she had to hustle on to the next event.

Artists and writers spent a lot of their time talking to editors about new projects and the news wasn't good. Most of the big publishers are imploding, which may be good news for collectors but is terrible news for creators. And no one wants to take a chance on a new project. Creator-owned projects were routinely ignored after the failures of the Malibu Bravura, Dark Horse Legend, and Acclaim Windjammer lines. One Marvel editor told me that he expected pickings to be slim, especially for writers, for some time. Big name artists are getting writer/artist assignments because publishers have to make concessions to get commitments from them.

"I can't even get free-lance assignments for myself," he said. "And I've got writers with families to support going without assignments."

The evening after the San Diego con, I wandered into one of the hotel bars an hour or so before closing. It was about half full and I saw few familiar faces. When I bought my Diet Coke at the bar, the bartender jerked his thumb toward the opposite end of the bar and told me, "That guy picked up your drink."

I looked down and spotted a senior editor from one of the big publishers who had been responsible for some of the biggest sellers in comics history just a year or so ago. Usually he had an entourage, but this time he was alone. I've never worked for him, but I've had many disagreements with him over the years. Once he cost me several thousand dollars by canceling a series of mine prematurely. He waved me over and we chatted about the industry like a couple of war veterans who have seen it all. I finally got my wake.

"Nothing's working like it did," he said. "The speculators are gone. The collectors are jaded. The publishers are nervous."

I nodded.

"The market is down to where it was 10 years ago. Maybe it's for the best."

Thanks for the Diet Coke, pal. But we still disagree.

Len Strazewski writes comics, and intends to keep writing 'em even if the pickings get slimmer than Kate Moss, and ***Vantage*** *is glad to have the old war veteran aboard.*

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